

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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CHAPTER III.

The Safe in the Lonely Warehouse.

The princess did not remain long after the departure of the police with the bogus detectives. It had been a very difficult corner to wriggle out of, all because Braine had addled to his plans after she had left the apartment. But for the advent of the meddling reporter the coup would have succeeded, herself apparently perfectly innocent of complicity. That most be the keynote of all her plans to appear quite innocent and leave no trail behind her. She had gained the confidence of Florence and her companion. And she was rather certain that she had impressed this lazy-eyed reporter and the stolid butler. She had told nothing but the truth regarding her relationship. They would find that out. She was Katrina Pushkin's cousin. But blood with her counted as naught. She had room in her heart for two things, Braine and money to spend on her caprices.

"How long has your highness known Mr. Braine?" asked the reporter idly, as he smoothed away all signs of his recent conflict.

"O, the better part of a year. Mr. Hargreave did not recognize me the other night. That was quite excusable, for when he last saw me I was not more than twelve. My child," she said to Florence, "built no hopes regarding your mother. She is doubtless dead. Upon some trivial matter I do not know what it was—she was confined to the fortress. That was seventeen years ago. When you enter the fortress at St. Petersburg, you cease to be."

"That is true enough."

"I did not recall myself to your father. I did not care at that moment to shock him with the remembrance of the past. Is not Mr. Braine a remarkable man?" All this in her charming broken English.

"He is, indeed," affirmed Norton. "He's a superb linguist, knows everybody and has traveled everywhere. No matter what subject you bring up he seems well informed."

"Come often," urged Florence.

"I shall, my child. And any time you need me, call for me. After all, I am nearly your aunt. You will find life in the city far different from that which you have been accustomed to."

She limped down to her luminous

In tripping up Norton he had stepped upon her foot heavily.

"She is lovely!" cried Florence.

"Well, I must be on my way, also," said Norton. "I am a worldly wise man, Miss Florence. So is Jones here. Never go any place without letting him know, not even to the corner drug store. I am going to find your father. Some one was rescued. I'm going to find out whether it was the aviator or Mr. Hargreave."

Jones drew in a deep breath and his eyes closed for a moment. At the door he spoke to the reporter.

"What do you think of that woman?"

"I believe that she told the truth. She is charming."

"She is. But for all her charm and truth I cannot help distrusting her. I have an idea. I shall call up your office at the end of each day. If a day comes without a call, you will know that something is wrong."

"A very good idea," Norton shook hands with everyone and departed.

"What a brave, pleasant young man!" murmured Susan.

"I like him, too, and I'd like him for a friend," said the guileless girl.

"It is very good to have a friend like Mr. Norton," added Jones; and passed out into the kitchen. All the help had been discharged and upon his shoulders lay the burden of the cooking till such time when he could re-enter the cook.

There was a stormy scene between Braine and the princess that night.

"Are you in your dough?" she asked vehemently.

"There there; bring your voice down at the bell. Where's the girl?"

"In her room. Where did you suppose she would be, after that batch-work of letting me go to do one thing while you had in mind another? And an ordinary pair of cut-throats, at that!"

The thought came to me after you left. I know you'd recognize the men and understand. I see no reason why it didn't work."

It would have been all right if you had consulted aclairvoyant."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" Braine demanded roughly.

"I mean that when you would have learned your friend the reporter was to arrive upon the scene at its most vital moment."

"What, Norton?"

"Yes. The trouble is with you, you have been so successful all these years that you have grown overconfident. I tell you that there is a desperately shrewd man somewhere back of all this. Mark me, I do not believe Hargreave is dead. He is in hiding. He may be near by. He may have dropped from the balloon before it left land. The man they picked up was probably the aviator. The five thousand might have been his fee for rescuing Hargreave. Here is the greatest thing we've ever been up against, and you start in with every day methods!"

antes. It read clear and frank. Trust a Russian secret agent to know what he was talking about.

So Norton's suspicions—and he had entertained some—were completely lulled to sleep. And he wouldn't have doubted her at all except for the fact that Braine had been with her when he had introduced Hargreave. Hargreave had feared Braine; that much the reporter had elicited from the butler. But there wasn't the slightest evidence. Braine had been in New York for nearly six years. The princess had arrived in the city but a year gone. And Braine was a member of several fashionable clubs, never touched cards, and seldom drank. He was an expert chess player and a wonderful amateur billiardist. Perhaps Jones, the tactful and inscrutable, had not told him all he knew regarding his master's past.

Well, well, he had in his time untangled worse snarls. The office had turned him loose, a free lance, to handle the case as he saw fit, to turn in the story when it was complete. But what a story it was going to be when he cleared it up! The more mysterious it was, the greater the zest and sport for him. Norton was like a boy all but compromised me. That butler worries me a little." Her expression lost its anger and grew thoughtful. "He's always about, somewhere. Do you think Hargreave took him into his confidence?"

"Can't tell. He's been watched straight for 40 hours. He hasn't mailed a letter or telephoned to any place but the grocery. There have been no telegrams. Some one in that house knows where the money is, and it's ten to one that it will be the girl."

"She looks enough like Katrina to be her ghost."

Braine went over to the window and stared up at the stars.

"You have made a good impression on the girl?" with his back still toward her.

"I had her in my arms."

"Oign, my hat is off to you," turning now that his face was again in repose. "Your very frankness regarding your relationship will pull the wool over their eyes. Of course they'll make inquiries and they'll find out that you haven't lied. It is perfect. Not even that newspaper would say anything wrong. Toward you they will eventually ease up and you can act without their even dreaming your part in the business. We must not be seen in public any more. This butler may know where I stand even though he cannot prove it. Now, I'm going to tell you something. Perhaps you've long since guessed it. Katrina was mine till Hargreave—never mind what his name was then—till Hargreave came into the fold. So sure of her was I that I used her as a lace to bring him to us. She fell in love with him, but too late to warn him. I had the satisfaction of seeing him cast her aside, curse her, and leave her. In one thing she fooled us all. I never knew of the child till you told me."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Hargreave was madly in love with her. He cursed her, but he came back to the house to forgive her, to find that she had been seized by the secret police and entombed in the fortress. I had my revenge. It was I who sent in the information, practically bogus. But in Russia they never question, they act and forget. So he had a daughter!"

He began pacing the floor, his hands behind his back, and the woman watched him, oscillating between love and fear. He came to a halt abruptly and looked down at her.

"Don't worry. You have no rival. I'll leave the daughter to your tender mercies."

"The butler," she said, "has full powers of attorney to act for Hargreave while absent up to the day the girl becomes of legal age."

"I'll keep an eye on our friend Jones. From now on, day and night, there will be a cat at the knothole, and 'ware mouse! Could you make up anything like this girl?" suddenly.

"He is like him, too, and I'd like him for a friend," said the guileless girl.

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